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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

73-143

24 July 1973

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Political Improvement in Cambodia,
Obstacles and Possibilities

1. Current Trends and the Present Situation. The Phnom Penh government's fortunes and the overall non-Communist position in Cambodia have deteriorated steadily over the past several months. Indeed, this decline has been continuous ever since the ill-fated Chenla II Campaign in the fall of 1971. Psychologically, the FANK has never really recovered from the drubbing the North Vietnamese Army gave its units in those 1971 battles along Route 6. From that time forward, the initiative has passed increasingly to the Communists, despite the fact that after Chenla II, the North Vietnamese turned over a progressively increasing share of combat responsibilities to their clients and, initially, pupils -- the Khmer Insurgents -- who now do most of the fighting. Although heavily outnumbered by the FANK, the Khmer Insurgents now clearly have the strategic initiative. They harass all the major lines of internal communication, and from time to time close each of them. The Insurgents control much of the countryside, and are mounting increasing pressure on Phnom Penh itself.

2. To date, the Phnom Penh Government (the GKR) has shown no sign of any ability to reverse this situation -- again, despite the fact that the combat force theoretically at its disposal is at least twice and probably three times larger than the Insurgents' combat strength. Even with the massive U.S. air effort now in train, the GKR's prospects for survival are not bright. If that air effort terminates on 15 August, further deterioration in the GKR's position seems certain -- and if even the current level of Insurgent pressure continues, the spectre of unravelling collapse is inescapably real.

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3. Continuing or increased U.S. assistance to the GKR might slow the rate of decay, but hardware and material aid do not of themselves affect and cannot offset the major obstacle to improvement: the Phnom Penh government's inability to pull itself together and use the physical assets it already possesses. This -- not hardware or other forms of quantifiable assistance -- is the central issue. Unless or until the GKR can start functioning as a government, there is little hope for any significant improvement in its position -- no matter what additional assistance the U.S. provides.

4. On the basis of the record of the past twenty months, it is as certain as anything in Indochina ever is or can be that there is no prospect of the GKR's beginning to function in this fashion so long as Lon Nol remains physically present in Cambodia. His whole behavior pattern, at least since his stroke on 8 February 1971, has been one of unwillingness -- or inability -- to manage the affairs of state, coupled with a concomitant unwillingness to let anyone else do so, or even try. His periodic retreat into a private world of congenial fantasy, his erratic meddling in the activities of his major subordinates, and his consistent refusal to delegate meaningful authority to others in the government have served to negate much of the value of U.S. support. Lon Nol's behavior patterns -- his arbitrary movement of units on personal whim and order, without informing (let alone consulting) his field commanders or general staff -- were major causal contributors to the debacle of Chenla II. There is no practical likelihood that Lon Nol will alter his pattern of behavior. This situation is not going to get better. If his brother Lon Non should return to Cambodia -- and there are indications that Lon Nol is considering this -- it will get worse.

5. Given the present parlous state of affairs in Cambodia, the real problem -- if improvement in the GKR's position and prospects is desired -- is not how much additional U.S. assistance can be provided but how Lon Nol's departure -- i.e., physical absence from the country -- can be arranged without destroying what little vitality remains within the government. This is not a question of deposition or ouster (though it could come to that), but a question of getting him to leave the country physically, retaining his title of Chief of State -- and hence the form of the current GKR -- but giving de facto "temporary" control to those who may be able to govern in a way that he, demonstrably, cannot.

6. 1963 and 1973 -- the Non-Parallel. One ghost that bedevils discussion of the above approach is the events of 1963 in South Vietnam. Whether the U.S. instigated and/or caused Diem's overthrow in 1963 or whether some Vietnamese (non-Communist) group would have inevitably overthrown him

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no matter what the U.S. did is something that will long be legitimately -- and passionately -- debated. Whatever the merits of these arguments about South Vietnam in 1963, they have no relevance to Cambodia in 1973. The two situations are not analogues and the course of action here envisaged with respect to Lon Nol is in no material respect parallel to the course of events that ended Diem's regime and life. Thus, the post November 1963 pattern of events in South Vietnam does not provide relevant arguments for or against encouraging Lon Nol's physical absence from the Cambodian scene.

7. Necessary Versus Sufficient Conditions for Improvement. Lon Nol's physical absence would not be any panacea or guarantee of improvement. There is no assurance that the three remaining High Council Members would be galvanized into facing Cambodia's many problems cooperatively or effectively. Though they seem more realistically aware than Lon Nol of Cambodia's perilous situation, and though the GKR was better run while Lon Nol was in Tripler Hospital recovering from his stroke than it ever has been while he was in Cambodia, Sirik Matak, In Tam, and Cheng Heng have not demonstrated any great ability to work together for common national goals. They have all engaged in carping about Lon Nol's shortcomings and in maneuvering against him and each other. If Lon Nol were to depart, they might not rise above their petty rivalries and backbiting. Furthermore, with Lon Nol gone, there would be an increased risk of a coup attempt against the remaining leadership, possibly with one or more members of the High Council cooperating or participating.

8. In short, Lon Nol's departure -- by itself -- is clearly not a sufficient condition for improvement in the GKR's position and prospects. From the pattern of the past two years, however, it can be persuasively argued that it is a necessary condition. If Lon Nol remains, the realistic prospects for improvement are virtually nil and further U.S. aid would probably be wasted. If he leaves -- physically, not titularly -- there is some chance of improvement, some room for maneuver and some likelihood that the right mix of U.S. aid and counsel could make a difference.

9. The Time Factor. With 15 August fast approaching, the hour is clearly late and the time short for improvement of much real consequence in a negotiating arena. It could be -- and is -- argued that given the time element, the risks involved in pressuring Lon Nol to leave are not worth the unprovable possibility of improvement if he goes. This is a legitimate argument not easy to counter. What the U.S. is faced with is the virtual certainty of a progressive deterioration in the Phnom Penh government's position and capabilities if Lon Nol

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VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS STAFF

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DATE: 25 July 1973

TO: See Below

FROM: GACarver, Jr.

SUBJECT:

REMARKS:

Attached is the "Lon Nol" memorandum in its final form. At Mr. Colby's direction it was distributed at the 24 July WSAG. Mr. Colby and General Walters already have copies.

George A. Carver, Jr.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

Copies to:

Mr. Shackley

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VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS STAFF

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

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DATE: 25 Jul '73

TO: The Honorable James R. Schlesinger
The Secretary of Defense

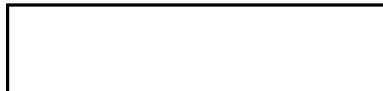
FROM:

SUBJECT: Cambodian Analysis

REMARKS:

Attached is a paper Bill Colby
and I circulated at the 24 July WSAG
which you may find of some interest.
Mr. Clements and Admiral Moorer
already have copies.

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George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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